

THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

Closer U. S. Look at Viet Nam

CPYRGHT

President Johnson on Tuesday sent White House aide McGeorge Bundy to Saigon on a fact-finding mission.

Soviet Premier Kosygin arrived in Hanoi yesterday with a top-level delegation for talks with North Vietnamese leaders. He stopped overnight in Peking where he was met by Premier Chou En-lai.

Two very important persons, one an American, the other a Russian, visited Viet Nam last week.

The American, McGeorge Bundy, is President Johnson's chief White House advisor on national security matters. He went to South Viet Nam at the behest of the President to confer with Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor and our military chiefs in the wake of the coup which so recently deposed Premier Tran Van Huong and reinstated Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh as strongman.

The Russian, Premier Aleksel I. Kosygin, landed in North Viet Nam yesterday with a party of high officials, including the chief of the Soviet air force. Moscow gave no explanation for the visit except to say it was "official" and would last four days. The Russian delegation stopped off in Peking, where Kosygin was met by Communist China's Premier Chou En-lai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi. The Russians and Chinese are still at odds, ideologically, and the reception was described as "correct, but cool."

Could Affect Policies

What Bundy and Kosygin learn and recommend could have a major impact on the guerrilla war which has been raging in South Viet Nam for a decade or more and United States and Soviet policies in connection with it.

Meanwhile, in the absence of any official disclosures by either Washington or Moscow—and it is still too early to get them—there has been an enormous amount of speculation on the Bundy and Kosygin visits and what they may portend.

Some observers see Bundy's trip as intended in part to assess Taylor's future usefulness in his delicate post, inasmuch as he has not been getting along very well with Khanh, now the undisputed top man in Saigon. Bundy, of course, will stress Johnson's desire for the building of a viable, stable government in South Viet Nam and United States willingness to support any such regime the Vietnamese can create.

Some Questions

But it has been the Kosygin visit to Hanoi which has provoked the greater speculation. It is the first such trip to North Viet Nam by a top Soviet leader since 1957, when President Klementi Voroshilov went there. These questions have been posed in the West:

- Is Kosygin there as part of a Soviet bid to regain its influence in a country which has lately been regarded as one of Peking's satellites and thus to check China's influence in Southeast Asia?

(Given the composition of the Kosygin party—the air force chief and the minister for foreign economic relations are members—it is not improbable that the USSR will offer North Viet Nam ground-to-air rockets, jet fighter planes, missile-firing naval craft of the kind Moscow has provided Castro Cuba, and economic aid.

(The Russian visitors got a warm reception in Hanoi. The North Vietnamese newspapers, perhaps significantly, carried articles support-

ing the Soviet policy of "peaceful co-existence," something the Chinese have bitterly opposed.)

- If, as some American officials contend, the long-range Soviet aim is to get the United States out of South Viet Nam and keep the Chinese out of North Viet Nam, is Kosygin trying to set the stage for some sort of mediation leading to an over-all negotiated settlement—perhaps in a resumption of the 14-nation Geneva conference on Indo-China?

- Or has the Kremlin decided that the North Vietnamese-sponsored Viet Cong guerrillas have victory nearly in their grasp and, accordingly, sent Kosygin to Hanoi to promise substantial new Soviet arms aid and economic support to assure it? The Soviet might thus try to give the lie to Chinese charges that it no longer has any burning interest in wars of "national liberation" being fought in the underdeveloped areas of the world.

Unclear to Johnson

As Johnson indicated when he was asked to assess the Kosygin visit at a hastily called White House news conference on Thursday, the purposes are not clear and we will have to wait to see.

There is no doubt, however, that the Kremlin's re-entry into North Vietnamese affairs is a major new foreign policy move by the regime which ousted Nikita Khrushchev last October. But both the Kremlin and the White House seemed to be anxious not to let it interfere with their stated goal of seeking closer relations and an easing of the cold war, which could be the neatest trick of the year.

When Moscow announced the

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